

THE STORY OF SNCC

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THE IDEA

After 300 years of oppression, black Americans still find themselves struggling for rights and powers long guaranteed them under law. A century after Reconstruction, 22 million Negroes are battling for recognition as human beings. To this struggle for full citizenship and dignity, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) has devoted itself since 1960.

SNCC has concentrated on the rural South, where 90% of the black people live in poverty. It works for basic change in their daily lives—not the mere passage of laws, not “acceptance” by whites, not tokenism. Decent jobs, homes, schools, roads: these are the dreams of the sharecropper and domestic, the janitor and ditch-digger, the people with whom SNCC works.

Almost from its beginning, SNCC realized that political and economic power was the key to those goals. Without power, black men can gain nothing; they can only ask and be endlessly frustrated. It is clearer than ever today that Negroes cannot depend on the American conscience to “give” black people their due. Basically, they must do it themselves—and this means the winning of power.

A BAND OF ORGANIZERS

To that end, SNCC serves as a band of organizers—a catalytic force to help build local leadership and grass-roots organizations. Its young workers (the average age is 23) come to a community bringing ideas, information and tools—but not domination. They live with the people, sharing their shacks and eating the same meager food. They spread the word: that neither poverty nor lack of formal education disqualifies a man from being able to assert his needs, make political decisions, participate in government. Poor people must represent themselves; paternalism must end.

Energy and creativity are released as people find a new image of themselves. Fear gives way to determination. “Apathy” dies as self-respect and a new sense of manhood are born. The community goes into motion: formulating its own programs, finding its own leaders.

Black people cease being ashamed of blackness. They control their own communities and share control in the larger community.

Then, and only then, does SNCC's basic goal—a society based on the spirit of community and humanism, in which all men can make free choices as equals—become possible. Then, and only then, does the end of racism become a real hope.



HISTORY



SNCC was born out of the sit-in movement which erupted across the South beginning on February 1, 1960. A conference at Raleigh, North Carolina, that spring brought together many of the demonstrating Southern students in a loose network of militant youth which was officially named SNCC in October.

From the drive against Jim Crow—discrimination in public places—they decided to move on to the struggle for more basic power. But disenfranchisement, maintained by racist terror, made this impossible at the time. From 1961 to 1965, SNCC workers devoted themselves to winning the vote. By October, 1961, SNCC had taken on staff for a voter registration campaign and had more full-time workers in the South than any other civil rights organization.

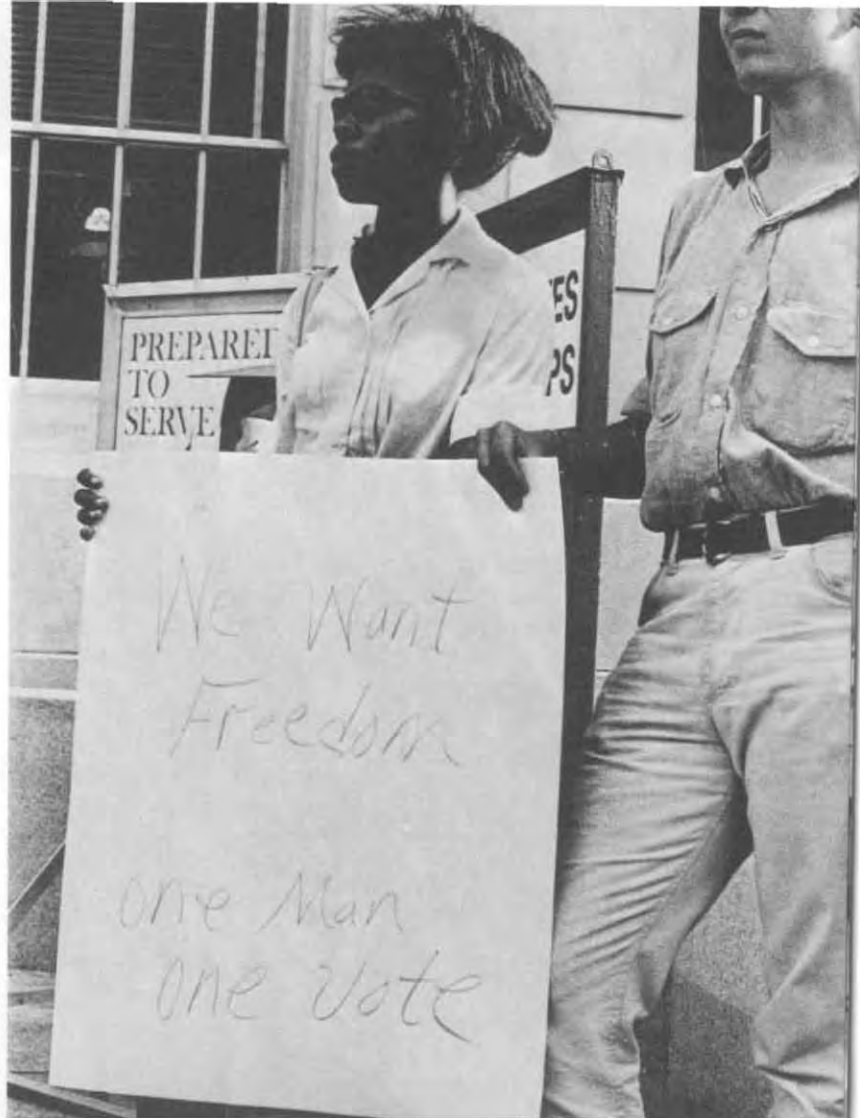
BREAKING OUT OF THE CLOSED SOCIETIES

For its first target, SNCC chose a Klan-ridden area with a long history of violent oppression: Southwest Mississippi. The movement gradually

spread across the entire state. In 1964, SNCC became the main impetus behind the Mississippi Summer Project, which brought 1,000 volunteers to work on voter registration and the creation of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (MFDP) as well as the establishment of Freedom Schools and Community Centers.

Some of the veterans of the early days in Mississippi went over to Albany, Georgia, in the fall of 1961 and set up a voter registration office. Result: the first large-scale black movement since the Montgomery bus boycott. By 1963, SNCC workers had also established bases in other areas of Southwest Georgia; Alabama; Cambridge, Maryland; Eastern Arkansas. Each became the scene of intense activity on the part of the black community, met by violent white retaliation. The human toll in those first five years of struggle—the jailings and beatings, the spiritual anguish and the physical deaths—can never be fully measured.

Without such pressure as SNCC mustered in that period, there would have been no 1964 Civil Rights nor a 1965 Voting Rights Act. This legislation, although not SNCC's primary goal, made it easier to move on to the next stage—where the danger and suffering are as great if not greater.



THE PROGRAM TODAY

SNCC is now working in Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, Arkansas and North Carolina on programs which emphasize voter registration, political education and organizing, within the context of what the black community needs.

1. Voter registration

SNCC has helped thousands of black Southerners to register. In terror-ridden Lowndes County, for example, not a single Negro was registered in August, 1965. SNCC went into that county and one year later half of those eligible are registered. Elsewhere in the South, SNCC presses to get more federal examiners; the government has sent registrars to only a handful of the 600 counties eligible under the Voting Rights Act. The price of voter registration work? Between August, 1965 and January, 1966 alone, Sammy Younge Jr. and Jonathan Daniels—two young men with SNCC—were shotgunned to death in Alabama.

2. Getting Black Candidates on the Ballot

"What does it profit a man to gain the vote, if he has no one to vote for who will represent his interests?" In several states, SNCC has for the past two years helped Negro farmers to run in elections for the Agricultural Stabilization committees, which determine some of the basic

facts-of-life in rural areas: how acreage will be used, who gets loans, etc. A number of these candidates were elected, although not yet enough to wield majority control. In Arkansas, 30 Negroes ran in School Board elections in 1965. All but one were defeated—largely because of fraud—and the election results have been challenged. In Atlanta, young Julian Bond was elected to the state legislature; the story of his efforts to take office dramatize the long struggle—and often danger—facing any black man who seeks office.

3. Independent political groups

In certain Alabama counties, such as Lowndes, SNCC found that newly registered black voters felt they had no recourse within the Democratic Party—dominated as it is by white racists. SNCC therefore helped form "freedom organizations" in five counties with large Negro majorities. On May 3, 1966 these new groups nominated candidates for (sheriff, tax assessor, etc.)—offices not held by black men since Reconstruction. If these groups win 20% of the vote in the November election, they are supposed to be recognized as county political parties under Alabama law and they can then go on to nominate candidates for state office, with the possibility of becoming state political parties if they get 20% of the vote in state elections.

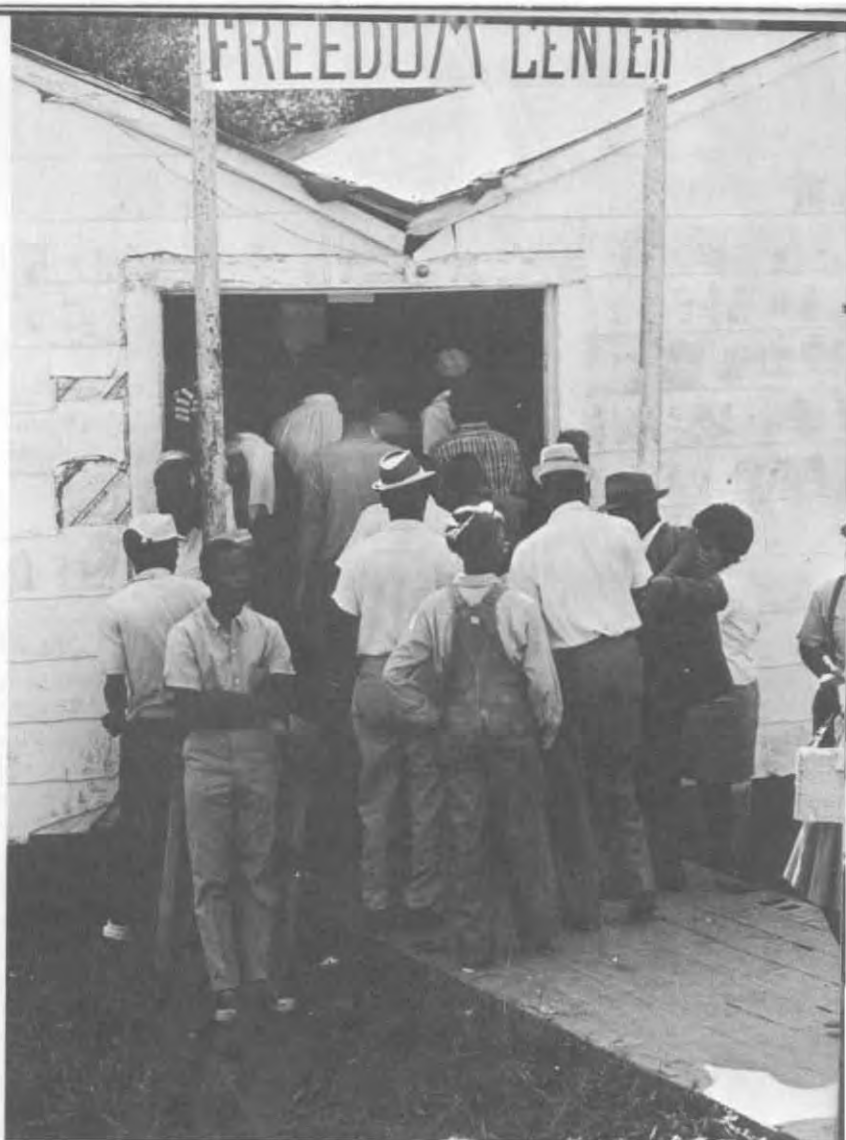
The ballot symbol of the Alabama groups is the black panther, representing the newly aggressive and courageous spirit of Negro demands. It stands for black power, which means that black people use their majority to control their own communities, and that they are able to negotiate from strength rather than weakness where they lack a majority.

A man needs a black panther on his side when he and his family must endure—as hundreds of Alabamans have endured—loss of job, eviction, starvation . . . all for seeking to run for office.

The form given to independent political action varies according to the community. Southwest Georgia lacks Alabama's unusual law providing for county parties; SNCC is organizing differently there. Elsewhere, candidates may run on a regular ticket but with independent programs geared to their constituents' needs.

4. Urban organizing

Independent political action is a major program in SNCC's work with ghetto residents of Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Philadelphia, New Jersey, New York and Boston. In Washington, D.C., SNCC organized the "Free D.C. Movement" around the issue of home rule; in Columbus, Ohio, it worked with the black community on an experimental program of self-government. Elsewhere, as in Atlanta, it has organized primarily around housing problems. These urban efforts date



back to action on the school issue in Chicago in 1953; as migration increases from the rural South, urban areas become increasingly important in SNCC's program.

5. The establishment of economic protest and self-help organizations

SNCC recognizes the importance of winning economic as well as political power. Black Americans have an estimated spending power of \$27 billion annually; SNCC wants to see these funds benefit the community—not a handful of men, black or white. SNCC has therefore aided in setting up credit unions and various cooperative enterprises such as The Poor People's Corporation in Mississippi, which has helped establish 15 co-ops and small businesses. SNCC workers also helped build the Mississippi Freedom Labor Union (M.F.L.U.) in 1965, when cotton laborers spontaneously struck against plantation owners in the Delta. Although effects of automation and the weapon of eviction undermined the strikers' impact, the mere idea of saying **No!** to economic slavery has been revolutionary. Elsewhere in the South, SNCC has worked to get better jobs and higher wages for black people. In both North and South, they have struggled to get black representation on local committees administering federal anti-poverty funds.

Other programs

Desegregation of public accommodations

SNCC continues its efforts to break down segregation in schools, parks and other public facilities across the South, by demonstrations and boycotts. These always evolve from local concern, and are carried out by local residents.

Poor whites

Because SNCC believes that poor whites must be organized if poor blacks are to find allies in the South, SNCC has begun an experimental program in Appalachia of training white workers for this purpose.

Staff training and scholarships

SNCC is expanding its program of mobilizing and recruiting Southern Negro college students. In 1966, the first in an annual program of summer-long training institutes was conducted in Atlanta for a group of these students. SNCC also maintains a scholarship program for staff members who wish to return to school after a period of service in the South and for prospective staff members who wish to take time out from their studies to work for SNCC but need assurance of funds for returning to school later.



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International affairs

SNCC is developing new programs for staff education in such areas as international affairs. In January, 1966, SNCC issued a statement opposing the war in Vietnam and has since participated in many anti-war demonstrations. SNCC has also conducted direct action programs against the apartheid system of South Africa, in the belief that black Americans must be aware of and support the struggle of their brothers everywhere.

BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS

In the schoolroom and in all aspects of daily life, black people are denied access to their own culture; they are taught that white is right, white is beautiful. A reawakening of cultural identity—the rebirth of what might be called psychological equality—is essential. SNCC has therefore initiated educational programs designed to encourage knowledge of black history and culture: not merely as past events but as a continuum rich in ideas and meaning for the present. Among these is the publication by SNCC of such books as **Negroes in American History**. Originally created for use in the Freedom Schools which SNCC

helped establish in the South, this "Freedom Primer" is now being used all over the nation to create a new idea of blackness in the minds of young people growing up in a racist society.

With a view to stimulating such self-respect, SNCC believes that organizers in a Negro community should be Negro because they demonstrate most effectively that black people can do things for themselves. There are, however, many other important ways in which white people can work with and help SNCC. One of the most vital jobs is to convince other whites that an end to racism is not only just but also in their own interest. This can mean working full-time to organize poor whites, holding discussions and workshops on race relations, or encouraging the teaching of Negro history to white children so that they, too, may grow up with new understanding.

* * *

Conducting these various programs are the 130 members of SNCC's full-time staff, and a volunteer "Freedom Force" of about 100. SNCC has a national office in Atlanta, with a printing operation, photo unit and research department. It has half a dozen offices in Northern cities which are supportive but also undertake action on local issues.



STRUCTURE

SNCC has no membership since it is an agency to stimulate and foster local movements independent of itself.

Decisions about SNCC's policies and programs are made by the Coordinating Committee, which includes all staff workers and meets twice a year.

The Central (or Executive) Committee, elected by and from the Coordinating Committee, implements those policies and programs.

The officers of SNCC, known as the Secretariat, are elected annually by the entire staff; they meet with the Central Committee.



Adherence to a fixed annual budget is impossible in an activist organization like SNCC; however, a financial statement is available on request.

SNCC's staff members live on subsistence pay. Field workers receive \$20 a week.

Most of SNCC's financial support comes from individual contributions. Its fund-raising is conducted by staff members and volunteers, so that the largest possible portion of income goes for the program itself rather than for overhead.

Some of the important items of expenditure are:

- Cars and their maintenance
- Telephones, including the WATS (Wide Area Telephone Service) for vital communication between Southern projects, the national office, and Northern offices

- Printing equipment and materials
- Subsistence pay for 130 workers
- Two-way radios, for security

YOUR SUPPORT IS NEEDED TO MEET THESE EXPENSES AND SUSTAIN THE STRUGGLE

SNCC needs and welcomes the support of all Americans in its struggle to create a society in which all men can make free choices, as equals. SNCC's struggle is the concern of everyone who wants to see democracy work.

SNCC's struggle is **your** concern.

FINANCES

WILL YOU HELP?

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